

## Message Text

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ACTION CU-03

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O R 281615Z MAR 77  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4401  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BERLIN 5627

E O 11652: GDS  
TAGS: SCUL, GE  
SUBJ: U.S. FILM RETROSPECTIVE

SUMMARY: MFA'S BETTIN HAS INFORMED EMBASSY THAT BECAUSE OF APPARENT DIFFICULTIES IN ACQUIRING GERMAN-VERSION FEATURES FOR US FILM RETROSPECTIVE, GDR CHANGING FORMAL AND WILL PUT ON A D.W. GRIFFITH FESTIVAL APRIL 12-MAY 6 FROM FILMS IN GDR ARCHIVES, WITH PROPOSAL THAT MODERN FILM RETROSPECTIVE BE POSTPONED UNTIL 1978. EMBASSY FEELS THAT NOTHING GAINED IN OBJECTING TO GRIFFITH FESTIVAL, BUT RECOMMENDS THAT PLANS SHOULD PROCEED FOR RETROSPECTIVE LATE SPRING OR EARLY SUMMER BY WHICH TIME EXCELLENT PACKAGE EXPECTED BE AVAILABLE. EMBASSY ALSO WISHES EMPHATICALLY IMPRESS MFA WITH NEED FOR CONTINUING CONSULTATION ON JOINT PROJECTS RATHER THAN CONFRONTING EMBASSY WITH SUDDEN UNILATERAL DECISIONS AND REQUESTS DEPARTMENT-USIA ADVICE.END SUMMARY.

1. DR. WERNER BETTIN'S REQUEST SEE PAO MARCH 25 CENTERED ON STATUS U.S. FILM RETROSPECTIVE AND ALTHOUGH IT PROVIDED TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TRANSMIT USG REPLY TO GDR CULTURAL PROPOSALS, REPORTED SEPTTEL, FIRST HALF OF MEETING TAKEN UP WITH GDR NEW APPROACH TO FILM RETROSPECTIVE. BETTIN BEGAN WITH STATEMENT THAT MINISTRIES OF CULTURE  
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AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS BOTH AWARE EMBASSY'S DIFFICULTIES IN ACQUIRING GERMAN-LANGUAGE VERSION MAJOR CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FILMS. (FYI - WE HAVE NEVER DISCUSSED THIS PROBLEM WITH GDR OFFICIALS BUT THEY OBVIOUSLY HAVE OWN MEANS COLLECTING INFORMATION. END FYI) THEREFORE, MFA WISHED TO RETURN TO ORIGINAL IDEA DISCUSSED WITH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN 1975 AT TIME OF GDR FILM RETROSPECTIVE,

AND WHICH BETTIN CLAIMS MOMA SUPPORTED, NAMELY, RETROSPECTIVE OF FILMS BY AMERICAN DIRECTOR D.W. GRIFFITH,

2. BETTIN SAID GDR STATE FILM ARCHIVE HAS EXCELLENT COLLECTION GRIFFITH SHORT AND LONG FEATURES, WHICH COULD BE SHOWN IN THE ARCHIVE'S OFFICIAL SHOWPLACE FOR ART-FILMS, THE STUDIO CAMERA. THE ARCHIVES DIRECTOR, WOLFGANG KLAUE, WOULD MAKE OPENING SPEECH APRIL 12 DESCRIBING FILM RETROSPECTIVE, AFTER WHICH, EVERY THREE DAYS, ONCE OR TWICE A DAY, GRIFFITH FILMS WOULD BE SHOWN, ADMISSION CHARGED TO GENERAL PUBLIC.

3. (GRIFFITH FEATURES AT HAND: BIRTH OF A NATION, WAY DOWN EAST, THE WHITE ROSE, AMERICA, THE STRUGGLE - ALL FULL LENGTH, AND TWO PROGRAMS IDENTIFIED AS BIOGRAPH I AND II, CONTAINING SIX SHORTS, SUCH AS ENOCH ARDEN, THE HONOR OF HIS FAMILY, THE BATTLE AT ELDERBUSH GULCH, AMONG OTHERS. THE RETROSPECTIVE WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL MAY 6.)

4. AS CONCERNED WHAT BETTIN TERMED "THE NEW, LATER IDEA OF COMBINING THE OLD WITH MODERN FILMS," HE SAID THIS IDEA WAS STILL VALID AND HIGHLY WELCOME BUT THAT THE MFA WAS NOW PROPOSING IT AS A SEPARATE RETROSPECTIVE FOR 1978, WITH NO NEED FOR SUCH EARLY FILMS AS THE GRIFFITH ERA. BETTIN ARGUED THAT POSTPONING THE MODERN FILM RETROSPECTIVE UNTIL NEXT YEAR, TO WHICH THE GDR GAVE A PRIORI APPROVAL, WOULD GIVE THE EMBASSY MORE TIME TO MAKE A GOOD SELECTION, WOULD PERMIT BOTH SIDES TO

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BETTER PREPARE EVERY ASPECT OF SUCH A LARGE UNDERTAKING, AND IN THE EVENT THAT THERE STILL WERE SOME FILMS IN ONLY ORIGINAL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE VERSIONS, THE GDR WOULD AGREE TO SYNCHRONIZE THEM, AND BE AMENABLE TO PURCHASING THEM.

5. BETTIN ASKED THAT WHEN CONVEYING THE ABOVE TO WASHINGTON, THE EMBASSY URGE THE DEPARTMENT AND USIA NOT TO GIVE POLITICAL INTERPRETATION TO THIS CHANGE, AND CERTAINLY NOW VIEW IT AS ROADBLOCKS IN CULTURAL RELATIONS. (HE REPEATED THIS ADMONITION AGAIN FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION LATER OF OUR RESPONSE TO THE GDR PROPOSALS, SAYING - "WITH SUCH PROGRESS IN ALL FIELDS, WE WOULD NOT WANT TO GIVE WASHINGTON THE IMPRESSION WE DISAPPROVE OF MODERN AMERICAN FILMS IN THE GDR.") HE SAID THAT IN THE OPINION OF BOTH INVOLVED MINISTRIES, HAVING GRIFFITH THIS YEAR AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS NEXT WAS AN EXPANSION OF THE FILM RETROSPECTIVE CONCEPT AND TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE U.S.

IF WE AGREED TO THE 1978 RETROSPECTIVE, BETTIN ADDED, THEN THE MFA HOPED THAT THERE COULD BE A GDR RETROSPECTIVE IN THE US THROUGH SOME AUSPICES, PERHAPS AGAIN MOMA. HE ASKED THAT A REPLY BE GIVEN BY THE END OF JUNE, AND CONCLUDED HIS PRESENTATION.

6. PAO EXPRESSED SURPRISE AND DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE MFA HAD PROCEEDED TO THIS POINT WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION, AND HAD APPARENTLY DECIDED TO PRESENT THE EMBASSY WITH AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT, NAMELY, A FULLY-PROGRAMMED GRIFFITH RETROSPECTIVE, DRAWN EXCLUSIVELY FROM GDR ARCHIVES, WITH THE MODERN FILMS NOW POSTPONED UNTIL NEXT YEAR. FOR THE FIRST TIME, BETTIN WAS TOLD THAT ACQUIRING GERMAN-LANGUAGE VERSIONS WAS IN FACT DIFFICULT BUT THAT WE WERE ON THE VERGE OF A BREAK-THROUGH AND THAT A RICH VARIETY OF EARLY AND

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O R 281615Z MAR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY BERLIN  
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CONTEMPORARY SOUND FILMS MIGHT BE AVAILABLE FOR OUR USE. WHEN BETTIN ASKED FOR SOME TITLES, HE WAS GIVEN " GONEWITH THE WIND" AND "2001-A SPACE ODYSSEY", TO BOTH OF WHICH HE NODDED VIGOROUSLY IN RECOGNITION AND APPROVAL. BETTIN URGED THAT IN ANY SELECTION, AMERICAN FILMS MAKING THE ROUNDS FOR YEARS IN THE GDR BE AVOIDED. (FYI - THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SUCH FILMS WHICH CONTINUE TO PLAY AND ARE EVEN SHOWN ON GDR TV, SUCH AS " CASABLANCA" -SOME LIKE IT HOT," " THE STING" AND MUSICALS - END FYI) " WE WANT YOUR NEW FILMS, THE BEST YOU CAN GIVE US, AND THAT IS WHY WE THINK YOU SHOULD ALLOW YOURSELF MORE TIME" BETTING SAID. PAO ASKED WHY IT WOULD BNOT BE POSSIBLE TO HOLD ANOTHER RETROSPECTIVE LATER THIS YEAR FOR JUST THE CONTEMPORARY

FILMS INASMUCH AS WE WOULD BE CERTAIN OF GETTING AN EXCELLENT SELECTION. BETTIN'S REPLY WAS VAGUE AND HE SEEMED UNWILLING TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION, REPEATING ONLY HIS REQUEST THAT THE EMBASSY CONVEY THE NEW APPROACH TO THE FILM RETROSPECTIVE TO WASHINGTON AND TRY TO RESPOND BY JUNE.

8. COMMENT. EMBASSY HAS GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT TO THIS SWITCH BY THE GDR IN PLANS FOR US FILM RETROSPECTIVE AS ORIGINALLY AGREED TO BY THE MFA LAST SEPTEMBER, CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCENTRATING ON THE TWO IMPORTANT ASPECTS; WHY DID THEY DO IT, AND WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT. IN LOOKING AT THE WHY, AND IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR OWN DESIRE TO EXPAND OUR CULTURAL RELATIONS, WE CANNOT IDENTIFY ANY POLITICAL BILATERAL REASONS FOR THE CHANGE.

HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT, GIVEN OUR DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING APPROPRIATE FILMS FOR A SPRING RETROSPECTIVE, THE GDR WISHED TO AVOID A SITUATION IN WHICH A US FILM RETROSPECTIVE COULD BE PROPOSED BY US FOR LATER IN THE YEAR, I.E., CLOSER TO THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION. FROM THE GDR POINT OF VIEW, AND TO EXTRICATE ITSELF FROM A POSSIBLY AWKWARD SITUATION, FAR BETTER TO SUBMIT THE GRIFFITH PROGRAM AS EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING GOOD-WILL RATHER THAN POSTPONE OR CANCEL THE ENTIRE PROJECT. THIS WOULD ALSO EXPLAIN WHY BETTIN EVADED THE PROPOSAL TO PROGRAM THE MODERN FILM WEEK LATER IN THIS SAME YEAR. AS CONCERNS OUR COURSE OF ACTION, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD EXPRESS OUR CONCERN AT THIS UNILATERAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT. IN THIS RESPECT, JOHN KORNBLUM'S VISIT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER TIMED AND IN HIS MEETINGS WITH MFA OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY DR. GEYER, WILL ALSO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STATE OUR POSITION.

AT SAME TIME, WE GAIN NOTHING BY OBJECTING TO THE GRIFFITH RETROSPECTIVE, FULLY AWARE OF CERTAIN DISTURBING SCENES IN " BIRTH OF A NATION," BUT REMINDED THAT CRITICS AND ARTISTS, SUCH AS SOVIET DIRECTOR SERGEI EISENSTEIN, CONSIDER GRIFFITH THE FIRST OF THE GREAT FILM DIRECTORS WHOSE TECHNIQUES WERE PIONEERING. ANY FILM RETROSPECTIVE MUST INCLUDE GRIFFITH, AND BY PUTTING ONE ON NOW DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO HIM WILL ALLOW US TO CONCENTRATE ON SOUND FILMS NEXT TIME. WE ARE ALL AWARE OF THE TRUTH OF BETTIN'S OBSERVATION THAT ACQUIRING GERMAN-LANGUAGE VERSIONS OF AMERICAN CONFIDENTIAL

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FILMS HAS BEEN THE MAJOR PROBLEM. WE HAVE, HOWEVER, FINALLY AT HAND A LIST OF AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY FILMS WHICH MAY BE AVAILABLE FROM GERMAN DISTRIBUTORS IN WEST BERLIN. THE LIST WAS PREPARED BY USIS BONN AND ENTREE TO THE DISTRIBUTORS ARRANGED BY USIS BERLIN. OBVIOUSLY, EVEN IF ALL THE FILMS WERE MADE AVAILABLE TO US, THE TIME IS MUCH TOO SHORT NOW TO PUT ON THE KIND OF FILM WEEK WE WANT ANND UNDER CONDITIONS WE FAVOR. THAT WE HAVE NOT YET PRODUCED A LIST OF AVAILABLE AMERICAN FILMS IS NOT THE GDR'S FAULT. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD TELL THE EAST GERMANS WE HAVE NO OBJECTION IF THEY WISH TO CONTINUE WITH THE D.W. GRIFFITH RETROSPECTIVE AS THEIR OWN PROPOSAL. AT SAME TIME, WE WISH TO CONTINUE WITH OUR PLANS FOR A US FILM RETROSPECTIVE LATER THIS SPRING OR EARLY SUMMER, CONFIDENT WE CAN OBTAIN APPROPRIATE FILMS. WE COULD POINT OUT THAT, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE YET TO PROVIDE LIST OF FILMS, OTHER ASPECTS OF PLANNING RETROSPECTIVE -- THEATER, ADMISSIONS, COSTS, ETC. -- WEERE HELD UP BY DELAYS ON GDR SIDE. IN DOING SO, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD MAKE CLEAR TO EAST GERMANS, AT THIS VERY EARLY STAGE IN OUR CULTURAL RELATIONS, THAT WE THINK IT IMPORTANT NOT TO BE PRESENTED WITH FAITS ACCOMPLI. WE WOULD URGE BETTIN ( OR OTHER GDR OFFICIALS) TO HOLD TO PROJECT AS AGREED TO IN PRINCIPLE LAST SEPTEMBER, AND THAT THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF THIS WOULD BE BETTER SIGN OF THEIR WILLINGNESS TO MOVE AHEAD ON MUTUALLY -ACCEPTABLE BASIS. ADVISE.

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## Message Attributes

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